DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 186 981 EA 012 616

AUTHOR Van Patten, James J.
TITLE Reflections on Obligation, Professionalism and the 21st Century.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 20p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Futures (of Society); Moral Issues; Moral Values; *Quality of Life; *Social Responsibility; Standards; Technological Advancement

ABSTRACT

A moral order exists that imposes on human beings an obligation toward other human beings, both present and future. This obligation includes making sure that the environment is maintained in a way that will provide for the basic human needs of future generations; accepting the responsibilities of professionalism, including the maintenance of professional standards and of a commitment to the continued learning necessary for coping with a changing world; and assessing and managing scientific and technological developments carefully. Improving international communications requires all human beings on Earth to join in accepting these obligations. (Author/PGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Van Patten

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED186981

EA 012 616

REFLECTIONS ON OBLIGATION, PROFESSIONALISM AND THE 21st CENTURY

James J. Van Patten
University of Arkansas

As we approach the 21st century, we may find that interdependence may well be the open door to human survival.

Electronic communications systems have given accessibility to the masses, giving feedback to leaders from their constituencies, thus providing possibilities for substantive changes in their positions to be shown by the media.[1] These communication avenues, though they may be controlled by governments, still provide the rubric for increased mutual knowledge of diverse peoples and cultures. As yet, we have not fully grasped the significance of computers as flexible information handling systems for new cross-cultural interfacing.

Biologists, through recombinant DNA technology, have gained a tool for learning more about the genetic code and for designing new organisms (actually inserting new genes into the genetic blueprints of certain bacteria) for industrial purposes such as engineering bacteria to produce valuable biochemicals.[2] This knowledge, shared across cultures, assists in making our world ever smaller and our horizons for common purpose greater. As we view our future, what obligations exist toward our environment, professionalism, and quality of life. These themes will be the concern of this paper.

Obligation, Environment and the 21st Century

Schutz notes:

> I experience a fellow-man directly if and when he shares with me a common sector of time and space. The sharing of a common sector of time implies a genuine simultaneity of our two streams of consciousness: my fellow-man and I grow old together. The sharing of a common sector of space implies that my fellow-man appears to me in person as he himself and no other.[3]

Future generations will also exist in this common life space. The challenge is to protect and preserve the environment in that life space not only for the present, but, also for future generations. Balancing self-interest and the larger social welfare, individual rights with social responsibilities, and present rights versus rights of future generations are of increased concern.

Adam Smith suggests that there is an "invisible hand" at work in the free market system working for broader social welfare since people will demand goods and services which benefit present and future cultures. Authors of Club of Rome Reports are pessimists, stressing limits to growth and warning of extreme shortages of natural resources to sustain life. Herbert Kahn of the Hudson Institute tends to be optimistic, noting advances in the technology which solves problems of environmental rape or excess use of non-renewable energy resources. Kenneth Boulding[4] also is optimistic that knowledge will meet

current environmental problems. He writes:

> At the moment, it doesn't look very good. Oil and gas will be gone in 50 to 100 years. But 10 years from now the whole picture could be very different. I can visualize some quite small technical change which will alter the picture enormously, and put the current doom-and-gloom prophets out of business . . . . . Unfortunately, there's a great temptation for the virtuous, for people who are socially conscious to become very anxious to stop everything. These prohibitionists are working us into a position where we're so intolerant of error that nobody will be able to do anything. And I'm very worried about not doing things.

It is important to consider environmental obligations for present and future generations. Obligation may be defined as that which a person is bound to do or forbear; any duty imposed by law, promise, or contract, by the relations of society, or by courtesy or kindness. It may also entail obligations of conscience, affection or ideals. In the writings of the Stoics, early philosophers cited duty or "kathekon" as a first principle, as that which would be suitable or fitting to do. In this concept, obligation transcended national boundaries and class distinctions.[5] In ecosystems, a first law is that of balance. Sears[6] suggests that all of nature can be conceived of as a "self-repairing", constructive progress which represents a type of equilibrium. When natural communities recycle energy, they gain a relative equilibrium or balance in relation to other communities. Those which do not succeed, do not survive. The concept of the balance of nature becomes a normative concept for the life of natural and human communities.[7] Thus,

humankind has an obligation to rethink our environment. Perhaps we ought to rethink our world. The world is given for human use and should be used for human good. Clean air and protection of non-renewable resources are honoring the world and nature, including present & future man. People should be to the world as the world is to people. Without a world there would be no human life. Considering the nature of present human life, many wonder if there will be a future world. Warren[8] suggests that future people have moral rights not because of such accidentals as age, race, sex or the historical period in which they exist, but because they are (or will be) sentient, self-aware beings with needs and desires. She notes that we cannot allow ambiguities of the term "potential people" to blind us to the morally relevant differences between the real people of the future, whose lives will be affected by what we do now, and potential people (embryos) of the present who may become beings with moral rights. Considering questions of why one ought to consider the good of others as well as his own carries moral obligation into social and political considerations.[9] Such a move entails as Dewey notes an "imaginative vision elicting possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual." He further notes that a person's ideas and treatment of his fellows are dependent upon his power to put himself imaginatively in their place. Dewey suggests that literature conveys the meaning of the past that is significant

in present experience and prophetic of the larger movement of the future.[10] Perhaps one could suggest an art of obligation as we educate ourselves and others to the larger meaning of interdependence in the present and future. As we learn to place ourselves in the place of others, we can agree with Dewey that the first intimations of wide and large redirections of desire and purpose are of necessity imaginative. And further that art is a mode of prediction not found in charts and statistics, and it insinuates possibilities of human relations not to be found in rule and precept, admonition and administration.[11]

Kavka[12] notes in some detail the general arguments used against concern for future peoples. He claims that those who tend to be oriented toward excessive use of non-renewable resources and lack of concern for the environment, overtly or covertly suggest that: 1) Future people do not exist. 2) We are in doubt of what future people want. 3) Future people may not exist at all. Kavka discusses each in turn. His basic assumption is that if we are obligated to make sacrifices for needy present strangers, then we are also obligated to sacrifice for future ones. 1) Even though future people do not yet exist, this difference does not constitute a reason for favoring interests of present over future persons. Location in space is not a morally relevant feature in determining the worthiness of a person. Neither is location in time. 2) While

we do not know what future people may want nor how to get it for them, we do know with a high degree of certainty the basic biological and economic needs of future generations -- enough food to eat, air to breathe, space to move in, and energy for machines. Satisfaction of these needs will be a base for other desires of future people. There are three steps that could now be taken to meet future needs. First, we could learn to care for our environment throughout the world. Secondly, we could invest internationally in survival sciences, -- renewable energy resources, war prevention, agriculture. Third, we could develop and design institutions and organizations to represent the interests of future generations. Their purpose would be to evaluate policies in terms of their effects on future, as well as present, generations. 3) Future people not only do not exist yet but possibly may never exist. What and how many future people may exist depends upon decisions and actions of present people. There are reasons for wanting human species to survive. Human life has value in itself, and the continuation of our species will very likely mean the continuation of its collective artistic, intellectual and scientific accomplishments. Kavka notes that the equal moral status of present and future persons suggests that our generation should, ideally, aim collectively at leaving our descendants a planet as rich in usable per capita resources as that we have inherited from our ancestors.

We should include in our educational goals obligations to

protect our environment for present and for future peoples. Our increasing interdependence is seen in worldwide shock waves over the distress and turbulence in fuel-importing nations, and over instability in the Middle East. The reasons for potential social upheaval are linked to international trade, investments, and other monetary arrangements.[13] This year marks the 26th anniversary of a project of international cooperation. CERN is a major international center for energy study, located on the French-Swiss border where Russians, Americans, Chinese, and Europeans work together. CERN is an acronym for European Organization for Nuclear Research, which was founded in September, 1954. Professor Victor Weishop[14] of MIT said of it:

> For me the development of CERN in the last three decades is not only an impressive story of success but also a fulfillment of a dream. Our dream was to see a great and active laboratory of fundamental physics in Europe that transcends national boundaries and is a symbol of a bright future, when humanity will be united and when national pride does not refer to any specific country but refers to our whole planet earth.

The concept of obligation presupposes a moral order which ought to be maintained and thus has prior claim over motives of mere self interest.[15] Barry[16] notes that justice requires that the overall range of opportunities open to successor generations should not be narrowed. He states that if some options are closed off by depletion or other irreversible damage to the environment, others should be created (if necessary at the cost of sacrifice). He further declares that intergeneration justice has three pertinent features. First is a

global extension of a principle that many families have passed on: "Keep the capital intact." Second, it underlines the asymmetry that many people feel between making successors better off, which may be a nice thing to do, but is not required by justice, and not making them worse off, which is required by justice. And third, it does not make the demands of justice to our successors depend upon our knowing their tastes, still less upon our approving them. Present and future peoples' quality of environment is an obligation that ought to be universal, representing common human concerns, aspirations, goals and if needed, sacrifices for future existence.

OBLIGATION, PROFESSIONALISM AND THE 21st CENTURY

If professional persons are to preserve the freedom and improve the character of the future, they must continue to learn throughout their lives from study and experience, the changing character of the problems which confront society and the changing means available for solving them. Only by so doing can their influence on public action be well-informed and free from bondage to propaganda.[17] Professional education should entail commitment to problem-solving skills. A general principle of professionalism is an encompassing responsibility for present and for future peoples' existence. Today's responsibilities include preserving, beyond its own termination, the possibility of responsible action in the future.[18]

Professionals become familiar with their field through training or apprenticeship, and a network of guildtype institutions, which act as custodians of those arts, and supervise the accreditation procedures for entry into the profession. Statutory bodies, established by legislation or official decree, confer on professionals the privileges attached to the profession, in return for acceptance by the professional "guild" of correlative responsibilities toward the public for maintaining the requisite standards of performance and conduct.[19] Such associations as the Philosophy of Education Association are legitimately concerned with the conditions of work in the professions, including its financial rewards. As informal trustees of the guild, they have the task of overseeing the quality of training in the degree-granting schools. Professional associations have a part to play in negotiations with accrediting agencies about matters of licensing, and about duties and privileges attached to the exercise of the profession.[20] Determining conduct worthy or unworthy of a professional, judgments may be made, reflecting three kinds and degrees of professionalism. One can characterize conduct as fulfilling, or failing to fulfill, the responsibilities placed on members of the profession by their contract with the rest of society. Secondly, less stringently, these judgments may concern the skills and procedures inherent to the practice of the profession. Third, normative judgments

of professional or unprofessional conduct may concern the extent to which the conduct in question supports or threatens to undercut special interests of the profession itself.[21] Professionals are often subject to two or more obligations whose demands conflict.[22] Even within the conduct of his profession (doctor, lawyer, teacher or whatever) an agent is subject to a number of distinct standing claims.[23] Thus, we have concern for Professional Codes.[24,25] Returning to our original reflections on obligations, Mothersill[26] suggests that in thinking about what course to take when faced with role conflict, reasonable persons try to see their wants in relation not only to their own interests but also in relation to the interests of others, evaluating alternatives in light of previous commitments and bearing in mind their obligations and responsibilities. The keynote of professional obligations for educators is to encourage habits which will be transformed into principles intrinsically incorporated into the pupils' lives,[27] enhancing their ability to see that justice is not the exclusive domain of legislatures and judiciaries but that there is a legislation of the mind which the mind has to plan and pass for itself. Self-legislation leads to shared and common goals in the exercise of self-responsibility which enhances the capacity of the self to see its relationship to the whole and to enter with empathy into the whole of life.[28] Professionalism within education entails commitment to keeping

the imagination alive; developing independent and critical, rational and reflective thinking; encouraging the acquisition of judgment, the nurture of deliberation and collaboration; practicing the art of choicemaking; learning to admire the aspirations of others and to perceive them as a means of enriching and enlarging the common aspirations.[29]

Thus the obligations of professionals fulfill Dewey's concept that intelligence becomes ours in the degree in which we use it and accept responsibility for consequences. Dewey further notes that every act may carry within itself a consoling and supporting consciousness of the whole to which it belongs and which in some sense belongs to it. With responsibility for the intelligent performance of particular acts may go a joyful emancipation from the burden of responsibility for the whole which sustains them, giving them their final outcome and quality.[30] Within the flickering inconsequential acts of separate selves dwells a sense of the whole which claims and dignifies them. In its presence we put off mortality and live in the universal.[31] Professionalism thus involves commitment to habits of inquiry designed to protect and preserve individuals.

QUALITY OF LIFE OF PRESENT AND FUTURE PEOPLES

We have explored environmental and professional obligations and finally will view science and technology.

Perhaps Bacon[32] set the parameters of caution:

> Lastly, I would address one general admonition to all; that they consider what are the true ends of knowledge, and that they seek it not either for pleasure of mind, and for contention, or for superiority to others, or for profit, or fame, or power, or any of these inferior things; but for the benefit and use of life; and that they perfect and govern it in charity. For it was from lust of power that the angels fell, from lust of knowledge that men fell; but of charity there can be no excess, neither did angel or man ever come in danger of it.

Both the public as well as scientists and technicians have become enamored with science. Nullius in Verba (we don't take anybody's word for it) became the motto for an age of science. In the 17th Century scientists were not considered essential to society, so a compromise was made with society. This compromise stipulated that scientists would not deal with normative, subjective or value-laden material. Scientists moved into universities, stressing research, gaining institutional protection, and establishing their control over the next generation of scientists. A comparison of the spring issue of Daedulus, 1978,[33] with the first 1958 issue demonstrated a significant rethinking of the role of science. The first issue of Daedulus founded in 1958 had viewed science and progress as inseparable. The spring 1978 issue however was devoted to the Limits of Science. Today citizens' sense of obligation toward future peoples is seen in new demands made on science. Environmental impact statements are required when nuclear or other potentially hazardous plants are built; committees on human experimen-

tation are being developed in major urban hospitals to provide for informed consent about experimental medical processes, risks and benefits. Subjects are informed they cannot be coerced and can leave anytime. Committees of concerned scientists are being formed to deal with unforeseen, unexpected consequences of scientific discoveries such as waste from nuclear plants. The public is involved in questioning the direction of science. For instance, eight Massachusetts citizens considered DNA research, discussing whether such research should be permitted and under what guidelines.[34]

The public has rediscovered environmental, professional, and quality of life obligations. Dismissed by the National Academy of Science in 1962,[35] as unimportant, others found that Rachael Carson's Silent Spring provided a new and useful outlook, and a new political force. Present peoples are questioning quick cheap technological fixes, finding unforeseen multiplier affects (Caveat Emptor). Thus increasingly, questions arise such as; What if "doing no harm" were added to scientific inquiry, and technological innovation? What if science and technology sought doing things in harmony rather than in contention with nature? What if science were to be linked more fully with society, involved in social participation through assisting in mediating value conflicts? As we increase our view of scientific obligations, we can explore choices about whether to go ahead with nuclear power, find

alternate sources of energy, or to combine both. Scientists could be used to explore crime increase. Some societies handle the problem by imposing heavy penalties for crime. We deal with crime behavior through analysis of behavior. Scientists are investigating the use of electrodes in the brain, drugs, and chain-of-brain-reactions as behavior modifiers. Obligations imposed on science in behalf of quality of life will be costly, will not be easy, may impose a drag on the scientific process itself, but in the long run it should prove good for society.[36]

INTERDEPENDENCE - A NEW SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Our time in history is rife with differences in emphasis and concerns. The way out of our challenges may well be the community. Charles Reich[37] in Greening of America refers to a Consciousness III community based upon a sense of species solidarity, a feeling that is expressed by the word "together". He further notes that love is not given by one person to another as a sovereign act; love is discovered; it is generated; it is in the community, and not merely the product of each individual's will. Reich suggests that people gain strength and warmth and energy from the community; it multiplies whatever is inside of each individual. For Kenneth Boulding[38] love has great power, particularly with regard to conflicts in the world community. Love means sharing, empathy, warmth, rapport and building

bridges across static, rigid, governmental lines of propaganda to an interdependence of present and future peoples. Love is the liberator that frees individuals from the rigidity of self-centeredness, allowing them to share universal human values. Tillich[39] gives no specific definition of love but he writes:

> It is life itself in its actual unity. The forms and structures in which love embodies itself are the forms and structures in which life is possible; in which life overcomes its self-destructive forces. And this is the meaning of ethics; the expression of the ways in which love embodies itself, and life is maintained and saved.

A new sense of community based on love is the route to a viable future. It is increasingly clear as we approach the 21st Century that governments are unable or unwilling to cope with the complexities of the modern world. New networks of communication designed to serve our environment, our inquiry and our life will have to originate with people themselves. Andrei Sakharov's voice from the Soviet Union protesting on behalf of human rights, the Committee of Concerned Scientists stressing human rights and values, and the community conservation efforts of Davis, California, express individual and collective efforts toward human survival thereby seeking to keep open the door to the future.

Finding and living a new sense of an interdependent community -- a community of present and future peoples -- we may be able to fulfill our obligations to the present and to the future,

thereby ensuring the existence of a future and of future people.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Steve Kimatian, "Communications: the World's New Battlefield Weapon", The Christian Science Monitor, Tuesday, (January 15, 1980), p. 23.

2. Robert C. Cowen, "The Uneasy Marriage Between Science and Society", The Christian Science Monitor, Thursday, (January 3, 1980), p. 12-14.

3. Alfred Schutz, "Social World and Social Action", in Studies in Social Theory Collected Papers II, (The Hague: Martinus Nyhoff, 1964), p. 23.

4. Diane Casselberry Manuel, "Kenneth Boulding: Upholder of Knowledge, The Inexhaustible Resource", Christian Science Monitor, Tuesday, (August 7, 1979), B2-B4.

5. Mary Mothersill, "Duty", in Paul Edwards, Editor, The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volume II, (New York: MacMillan, 1967), p. 442-444.

6. Paul B. Sears, "Utopia and the Living Landscape", Daedulus, 94, No. 2, (Spring, 1965), p. 484.

7. Thomas B. Colwell, Jr., "Ecology and Philosophy", In James Rachels and Frank A. Tillman, Philosophical Issues. (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 360.

8. Mary Warren, "Do Potential People Have Rights", in Editors, R. I. Sikora and Brian Barry, Obligations to Future Generations, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), p. 29, (Hereafter text referred to as Obligations.)

9. James Mark Baldwin, "Obligation", Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, (New York: MacMillan, 1902), pp. 194-195.

10. John Dewey, "Art and Civilization", in John R. Burr and Milton Goldinger, Philosophy and Contemporary Issues, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1972), p. 436-439.

11. Dewey, Ibid., p. 439.

12. George Kavka, "The Futurity Problem", in Obligation, p. 187.

13. Ehud Levy, Pascal, "Will the Rising Price of Energy Push Us Over the Cliff" The Futurist, Vol. XIII, No. 6, p. 480.

14. "CERN: The First Twenty-five Years," Christian Science Monitor, Wednesday, October 10, 1979,) p. 16.

15. Sharler Mathews and Gerald Berney Smith, A Dictionary of Religion and Ethics, (New York: MacMillian, 1921), p. 139.

16. Brian Barry, Circumstances of Justice and Future Generations in Obligations, p. 243-244.

17. Elliot Dunlap Smith et. al., Education for Professional Responsibility, (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1948), p. 4.

18. Hans Jonas, "The Concept of Responsibility: An Inquiry Into the Foundations of an Ethics of Our Age", in Editors H. Tristram Englehardt, Jr. and David Callahan, Knowledge, Value and Belief, (New York, Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences, 1977), p. 189.

19. Stephen Toulmen, "The Meaning of Professionalism", Ibid, p. 255-256.

20. Ibid., p. 256-257.

21. Ibid., p. 258.

22. Ibid., p. 259.

23. Ibid., p. 260.

24. Nina Moore Glaston, Professional Responsibility of the Lawyer: The Murky Divide Between Right and Wrong, (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, 1977).

25. Andrew I. Kaufman, Problems in Professional Responsibility, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976).

26. Mothersill, "Duty", p. 442-444.

27. Peter Gelhardt, "Schools Moral Reciprocity, and Democracy", Christian Science Monitor, Monday, (June 4, 1979), p. 20, (Mr. Gebhardt is headmaster of Geelong College near Melbourne, Australia. He just completed a year of special study at Harvard University, exploring John Dewey's teachings on Democracy).

28. Ibid., p. 20.

29. Ibid., p. 20.

30. John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, (New York: The Modern Library, 1957), p. 314-331.

31. Ibid., p. 332.

32. Francis Bacon, The Great Instaturation, Preface Works, Volume IV, Translation, p. 20-21.

33. Everett Mendelsohn, Harvard College, "Science and Society: Challenges in a Democracy", July 23-28, 1978.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Charles A. Reich, The Greening of America, (New York: Random House, 1970,) p. 386.

38. Diane Casselberry Manuel, "Kenneth Boulding" Christian Science Monitor, Tuesday, (August 7, 1979), B2 - B4.

39. Paul Tillich, Morality and Beyond, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), p. 94-95.